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ABSTRACT

Proposed is an integrative-organized approach to early childhood education to maximize the total development of the child. The overall goal of this approach is to provide an environment conducive to learning through active exploration and social interaction. Implementation of an integrative program requires an understanding of the organization of behavior. Specifically, it is asserted that behavior should be examined from a developmental perspective focusing on reciprocal relationships among the psychological, cognitive, social, emotional, and physiological systems. A brief review attempts to account for the interrelationships between emotional, social, and cognitive systems. The role of physical-motor abilities in facilitating the acquisition of knowledge is also acknowledged. Implementation of this approach requires the teacher to have (1) an understanding of the hierarchical organization of behavior; (2) the ability to assess children's levels of development; (3) an awareness of and respect for individual differences in behavior; (4) an openness and flexibility in utilizing the personal "resources" children bring with them; and (5) an appreciation for the importance of social competence and emotional well-being to children's development. Such knowlege aids the teacher in providing quantity, variety, and appropriate experience for the child's level of development; stimulation contingent upon the child's behavior; and social interaction that teaches the structural rules of communication. (AS)

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An Integrative-Organized Approach to Early Childhood Education

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Educational frameworks are basically approaches used to foster the child's development. Minuchin and Shapiro (1983) have stated that the various educational models "differ principally in the scope of their developmental goals...; their conceptions of how children learn...; in the amount of autonomy given to the children; conceptions of the teacher's role...; (and) the provision of possibilities for learning from peers" (p. 211). One of these models, which seeks to maximize the total development of the child is the integrative-organized approach to early childhood education.

Recent advances in our understanding of social cognition have highlighted the importance of examining behavior from an integrative organized perspective (Lewis & Brooks-Gunn, 1979; Sroufe, 1979b; Stevenson & Lamb, 1981). While the implications for practical application of the integrative-organized framework have been in the research literature, implementation of the framework in education and other settings has been limited.

The present article describes the basic concepts related to the organization of behavior. The implications of these concepts will be discussed in

relation to the development of effective early childhood education programs that will truely foster the child's "total" development. The overall goal of the integrative-organized perspective of early childhood education is to provide an environment conducive to learning through active exploration and social interaction.

In order to implement an integrative early childhood education program, one must understand the organization of behavior. Specifically, behavior should be examined from a developmental perspective that focuses on the reciprocal relationships between the psychological, cognitive, social, emotional, and physiological systems (Sroufe, 1979b). One should also keep in mind the essential elements of education as proposed by Piaget (1970) that, "To educate means to adapt the individual to the surrounding social environment... (and) seek to encourage this adaptation by making use of the impulses inherent in childhood itself, allied with the spontaneous activity that is inseparable from mental development" (p. 151).

Although Piaget's (1969) investigations were mainly cognitive in nature, he was of the opinion that cognition is inherently social and emotional.

According to Piaget and Inhelder (1969) organic growth, direct experiences or action, social interaction and transmission, and an innate mechanism of maturation contribute to intellectual and cognitive development. They further stated that in understanding children's development one must consider both the ontogenetic (biological) and the social dimensions. Piaget and Inhelder postulated the existence of a "functional parallelism" between affect and cognition, with affect providing the energetics of behavior while cognition the structures for development.

Other investigators of social cognition, influenced by Piaget, have also recognized the influence social and emotional experiences have on development. A child develops progressively into a socially organized and emotionally expressive human being. From the time of birth, an infant is not only a passive recipient of stimulation but an active creator of interactions with others in the environment. Since an infant's experience is primarily sensorimotor, emotion reflects the meaning of its transactions with both the social and the physical world (Cicchetti & Pogge-Hesse, 1981).

With the emergence of symbolic/representational thought, a child's experiences become less sensorimotor. But action continues to play an important role in the young child's acquisition of knowledge about the world, and social competence is basic to a child's social and intellectual development. Berison (1982), among others, has stated that social interaction provides infants and young children both social knowledge and social development of knowledge. All knowledge is inherently social in that the ontogenesis of mental development is motivated and maintained by social discourse" (p. 202). This viewpoint is congruent with Piaget's theory that all knowledge is social because it is through "interchange of thought with others that we are able to decentralize ourselves... to coordinate internal relations deriving from different viewpoints" (Piaget, 1963, p. 64).

Berison (1982), Cicchetti and Pogge-Hesse (1981), and Sroufe and Waters (1976) propose that cognitive and affective development are interactive. They believe that it is inaccurate to discuss the cognitive underpinnings of affect without also noting the interdependence of cognitive ability with affect. Sroufe and Waters discuss the reciprocal influence of

affect and cognition as follows: "In a reciprocal manner, cognitive changes promote exploration, social development, and the differentiation of affect and affective-social growth leads to cognitive development" (p. 187).

The above review attempts to account for the interrelationships between emotional, social, and cognitive systems. It should also be noted that physical-motor abilities facilitate the acquisition of knowledge through action schemes. Action and thought are interrelated and mutually dependent especially in infancy and early childhood. Action initiates and creates learning opportunities. It also provides the means for exploration and subsequent learning about both the physical and social worlds. From a Piagetian perspective, structural change in cognitive development is a result of the interaction between the child and the environment.

The implementation of an integrative-organized early childhood program requires the teacher to have: (1) an understanding of the hierarchical organization of behavior; (2) the ability to assess a child's level of development; (3) an awareness of and respect for individual differences in behavior; (4) an openness and

flexibility in utilizing the personal "resources" children bring with them; and (5) an appreciation for the importance of social competence and emotional well-being to a child's development.

Piaget (1970) has suggested that in order to provide active learning in an environment that promotes social interaction one must be aware of "...the significance of childhood, the structure of the child's thought, the laws of development, and the mechanism of infantile social life" (p. 151). Thus, fundamental to the implementation of an integrative program of early childhood education is the teacher's understanding of the stages of various areas of development. Such knowledge aids the teacher in providing an effective program by incorporating the five essentials outlined by Sherrod and Lamb (1981). In general, the teacher should provide: (1) quantity of experiences; (2) a variety of experiences; (3) appropriate experiences for the child's level of development; (4) stimulation contingent upon the child's behavior; and, last but not least, (5) social interaction that teaches the structural rules of communication (pp. 378-385).

In addition to knowledge of developmental stages, the teacher must recognize the significance of

childhood which is characterized by "the impulses inherent in childhood itself, allied with the spontaneous activity that is inseparable from mental development" (Piaget, 1970, p. 151). These childhood impulses, such as, a desire for activity, manipulation, exploration, and a sense of curiosity, should be capitalized on in planning programs and activities. Children learn best through active exploration, i.e., through action and not being acted upon. Their sense of curiosity reflects their interests and provides valuable "teachable moments." Thus, the teacher should provide a climate that has enough limits and permanence, so that the child has the necessary sense of security to explore. Sroufe (1979a) has pointed out that the role of affect in the organization of behavior provides the child a sense of "security in the familiar, yet attraction to the unfamiliar" (p. 835). This duality is important in providing a motivation for learning.

Lastly, the mechanisms of social life set the stage for and limits on learning, in addition to adding interest and variety. The teacher, through socially mediated interactions, provides the child with learning experiences or opportunities. Yet, teacher-child

interaction is often constrained due to its tendency to be assymetrical and unidirectional which could lead to passive learning, that is, learning as a result of being "acted upon." Whereas, there is more spontaneity, reciprocity, and mutuality in the interchanges between and among peers. These interchanges are essential because they provide learning through social discourse and active participation.

Overall, the integrative-organized perspective of education is dependent upon the teacher, who must create an environment that encourages learning through social-emotional interactions between children, as well as, between children and adults. The teacher is receptive of the children as individuals with different abilities, interests, and strengths; and can utilize these "resources" in program planning. One must also be cognizant of the laws of development, stages of development, and children's logic, in order to provide appropriate experiences. The child has the freedom to explore and interact in order to actively discover knowledge about social and physical concepts. The teacher can conceptualize how each system--physical-motor, social-emotional, and cognitive--can be integrated to promote optimal learning. Finally, this

integrative-organized model, in emphasizing social interaction, suggests that individual social competence is a prerequisite to active learning.

In summary, Sherrod and Lamb's (1981) five socially mediated perspectives on learning can be used in facilitating program operation (execution). The provision of a quantity and a variety of appropriate experiences that are contingent upon the child's behavior are dependent upon the teacher's sensitivity to the child's ideosyncrecies, and an understanding of the factors proposed by Piaget. Underlying all of these is the realization that communication is fundamental to the development of social competence. It is necessary for initiating and maintaining relationships, and in developing cognitive competence. Hence, Sherrod and Lamb's (1981) socially mediated mechanisms compliment Piaget's (1969) position on active education. They are the major prospects to be considered in implementing an integrative-organized model of early childhood education. This social-emotional perspective on cognitive functioning is conceptualized by Sroufe in describing attachment as an organizational construct:

> "...the infant's joy in mastery, an affect likely to yield cognitive development, is the psychological foundation for development. ...The infant's belief in its own effectance is likely to come first from caregiver-infant play which...helps to teach the infant to tolerate increasing amounts of tension without breaking contact and without its behavior becoming disorganized. Tension tolerance and sustained attention in the face of challenging complexity are fundaments for important learning" (Cicchetti & Pogge-Hesse, 1981, p. 248).

This same construct can be translated into early childhood education. The socially competent child is more likely to accept his own competency in dealing with the demands of the environment. Perceived social support, from adults and peers, may enable the child to better tolerate the frustrations and possible behavior disorganization associated with the complexity of the learning environment. Therefore, the child who is more psychologically/emotionally intact, has a longer attention span and is more willing to explore new concepts.

The integrative-organized perspective of early childhood education proposed in this paper is based on theoretical assumptions and empirical findings. The authors have tried to integrate the factors that are essential to program development and implementation. It is believed that with an understanding of the thinking underlying this model, the teachers can, with creativity, conduct a program that is responsive to each child's "total development."

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